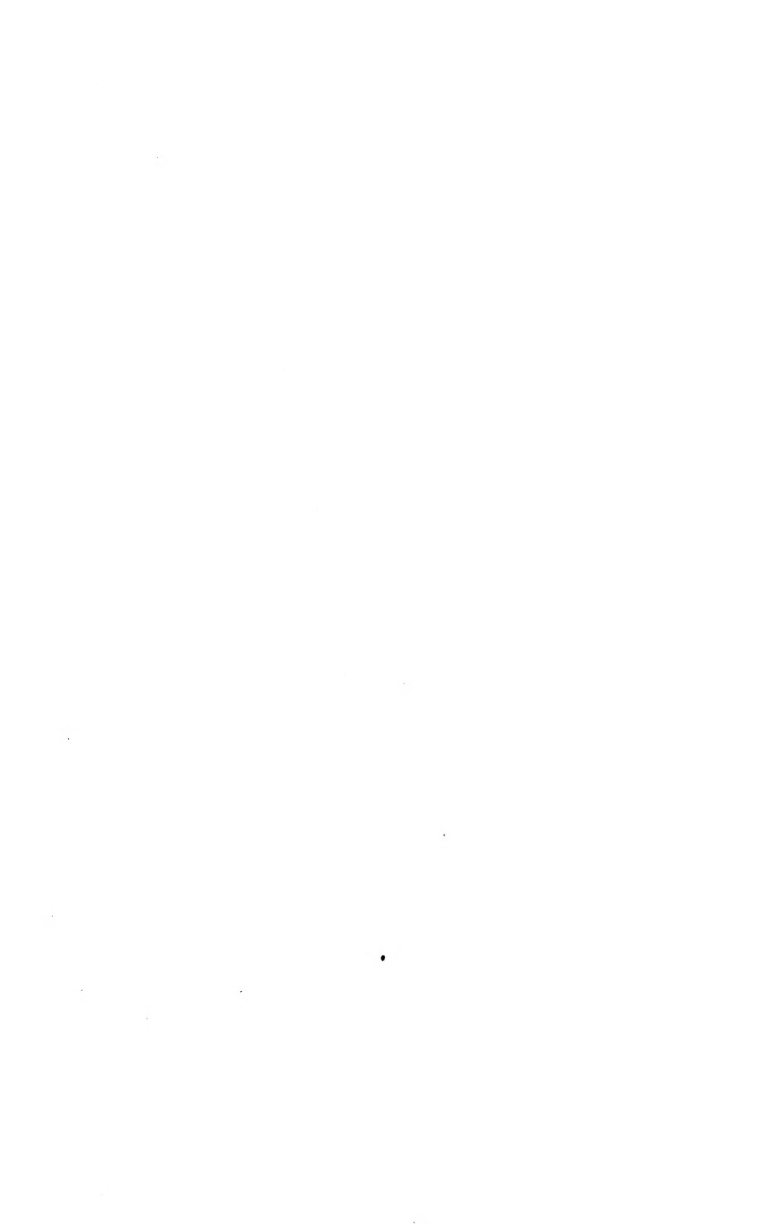


THE EXCEEDING WORTH
— OF —
JOINING THE CHURCH
—
KEEDY

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The exceeding worth of
joining the church



THE EXCEEDING WORTH OF JOINING THE CHURCH

BY

✓
EDWARD E. KEEDY

AUTHOR OF "THE NATURALNESS OF CHRISTIAN LIFE"

"MORAL LEADERSHIP AND THE MINISTRY"

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BY EDWARD E. KEEDY

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CHAPTER I

THIS LITTLE BOOK IS INTRODUCED TO THE READER

This little book is put into the reader's hands through the interest of several men, acting as they believe upon a prompting of God. For God still lives, and still works. So true is it that God's part in our lives is one of the most significant things about them, that our good intentions, and good feelings, and good deeds, coming to being in us — like some great teacher's knowledge coming to being in his pupils — are of his prompting. If then, for example, men in common life convey a message to other men by means of letters and booklets, it is not likely that God be so stupid a manager as not to use the chance there is in some little book He has caused to be written and put into the hands of one whose heart He has opened. If in business affairs, men are moved to action by even an advertisement — great businesses being built up through the use of print — it would seem as if God could not be so stupid as not to

know what business men know so well, nor knowing it, that He would be so careless as not to use it. No, reader, doubt not that God working his purpose through men, has put this book into your hands.

If there came into your hands a booklet claiming to be from some great business corporation with a message of financial gain, you would give it attention and time, weigh its claim and its message. There is asked for this little book the same candid consideration. You may be inclined to put it aside unread and unconsidered. But you would stand condemned if you had to acknowledge to yourself that you who give sincere and eager attention to a proposition concerning making money, had given short unheeding shrift to the message of those claiming to speak for God. More likely however, is it, that the same Mind that has brought this message into your hands will prompt you to consider the message and weigh the claims of those bearing it, and there be given by that decision to deal candidly with the matter, proof both that God is speaking to you, and that you are giving an honest answer.

The matter brought to you with this high

claim has to do with your becoming a member of the Church. For consider that God,



He would deserve utmost contempt, who, giving all needed time and serious attention to proposals for making money, had given short unheeding shrift to the proposals of those claiming to speak for God.

should He speak to you, would be likely to concern Himself with something like this. The character of the message brought, therefore, favors the claim with which the book is introduced to you, and bespeaks from you a serious welcome.

It may perchance be that you do not care to know what God desires to speak to you

about this. You may have no interest in the matter, nor care to be reminded of duty. But surely if there be a God at all, the great thing is not so much what you want to hear, as what He wants to speak. He speaks to many a man who would rather not hear Him, as responsibility holds fast many a man who has tried to escape it. To do what one would like to do and not what one ought to do, would be as if in a great business, the office boy should boss the manager. No; to order life rightly is greater business than to have what is pleasant, and no man, without disaster, can turn the management of his life over to the mere liking in him. For somehow this sense of ought in us fits in with all the things of life and of the world, just as that other sense which we know as sanity fits in without confusion with all things. What God has to say always answers to something that is deep in us. It never violates our reason or our conscience. If this little book speaks to your conscience and to your intelligence, that too, is proof that it is from God.

You may of course now close the book and deliberately avoid the consideration of the

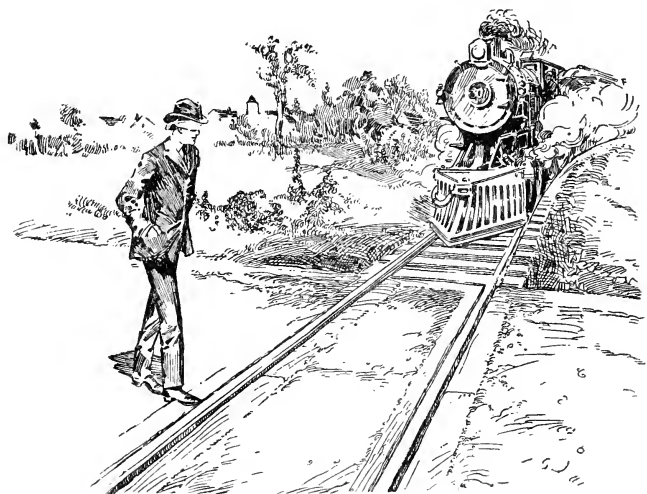
whole matter. That, however, does not change anything. It is only as if one closed



"To do what one would like to do, and not what one ought to do, would be as if in a great business, the office boy should boss the manager."

his eyes to things. The things would not change. We can avoid the consideration of the advice of the doctors, and the laws of the State, and the laws of health, and the word of the Bible, and the claims of the Church,

and that we are in debt, and the judgment of God. But to live in disregard of these things



That we keep ourselves from knowing the facts is no escape from them. By tying our eyes shut we can keep things from being seen, but it does not change them, nor blot them out. Better a thousand times, a square look at things as they are, than any ignoring them.

does not blot them out of existence; it is only to keep them out of sight. That the adulterer does not look within does not make him less an adulterer — it only keeps him from seeing himself. The mariner by ignoring the compass and chart, removes no rocks from the sea. To avoid thinking about death

does not prevent its approach. Not to consider the claims of the Church is to prove none of them untrue — it is only to keep one from seeing things as they are. For things are as they are and not what anyone in his unthinking wants them to be. Thus, the only safety lies in squarely facing them and honestly considering them.

CHAPTER II

HUMAN NEED BRINGS THE CHURCH INTO BEING

The Church is simply a group of Christian persons organized for work. God has a purpose that He wants fulfilled in the world. He is not a stupid manager who cannot see what effort will do — organized effort; can see it quite as well as our captains of industry see it. The Church is here by the same necessity for those careful adjustments of each person to the whole, that exists in the army, in business, in the family, and in the State. Whether it be building a railroad, or founding a State, or overcoming an invader, the prime necessity is that men merge individual effort, get together, and give each other loyalty. The more intensely men feel the passion to get something done, the more do they feel the necessity of getting together. Men do not go their separate, unrelated ways in an industry, nor in an army, nor in a family, nor in a State. The manager of a mill marshals every man, gives him his place, and his

responsibility, relates his effort to the whole purpose, and sees that he is productive. In time of war, the State is all the closer organized for effectiveness, every man being given his station and his work. On the farm, the "hands" do not carry on each a separate and unrelated enterprise, but order their labor to the common end. So amply vindicated on every hand, it would seem that this same necessity for organization would be likely to be insisted upon all the more positively in the Church of God. God asks not only that we serve Him, but that in our loyalty we serve Him in the manner in which we may accomplish the most.

CHAPTER III

PUBLIC CONFESSION IS REQUIRED IN OTHER RELATIONS

It is likely that you, reader, are already trying to serve God. It may be however, that you are trying to serve Him secretly and individually. You attend church services, you associate with God's people, you have a purpose to do good works, you contribute to the support of the Church, you maintain, it may be, the habit of prayer, and you are trying to be loyal to Christ. But the Church has never countenanced secret discipleship. It has always insisted upon public confession. Christ himself insisted upon it, and for the best reasons. If one really desires to work for Christ — and without this desire one cannot be a Christian — he will be impelled to join the Church with the same inevitableness with which men with a common purpose come together in a partnership, lovers in marriage, pupils in a school, and soldiers in an army. And if in a community without a Church, there were a number of

persons with a common purpose to serve Christ, a Church would inevitably come to be. The Church is here with the same inevitableness with which the State is here; it is here with the same inevitableness with which the family is here; it is here with the same inevitableness with which organized business is here; it is here with the same inevitableness with which the school is here. A Church is the partnership of those in a community who are in earnest in doing something for Christ.

First the Christian and then the Church. Just as first the love and then the marriage. Marriage does not make two persons love. No; their loving makes them be married. Marriage is the expression of their love, not its cause. Marriage is an expression of love, but why does the State insist upon a public expression of it? Why may it not be a private and secret matter between the two persons chiefly concerned? Because secret marriages do not hold. The fidelity that is only secretly promised, to begin with, is not hearty—else it would not ask concealment—slips into weakness, and then ceases to be. The mere intention, if not made definite and

a matter of deed, grows hazy and vague. We understand this perfectly in business, where in practice, — though a man's intention and word are perfectly honorable — that secret, intangible intention and word are for his own better keeping, made to become formal and concrete. Better that the agreement be put into writing, and become as we say, "a bond," that is, something that binds; or a "deed," that is, something done. Suppose for a moment, two persons loving each other, only secretly took the vows of marriage, and secretly became man and wife. Now that secrecy means, to begin with, that rather than brave some obstacle, they will give up their love. There is thus no real faithfulness to begin with. And when this love grows cold, and disagreements strain this secret bond, this love does not hold. The purpose of two such persons, even though clear and strong at first, under the desire for freedom, grows shadowy and vague. Vows thus made, even with elect persons, become much as none at all.

Publicity in marriage, on the other hand, is proof of utmost fidelity to begin with, tends to keep marriage sacred and to make the

bond secure. The State knows this, and compels publicity in marriage. Secret marriage would mean not marriage, but free love. A man's own wavering purpose is in fact established by the expectation of the public. His own dulled conscience is sharpened by the conscience of the public. Even our laws with their penalties, add their wholesome restraint. Many a man sorely tempted to break his marriage vows, has thus been steadied in the day of temptation, who but for the restraint inseparable from a public conscience, would have done what would have been to his everlasting shame. Save for something broader than individual whim, something realer than secret intention, society would not hold together. In publicity we put behind us the stronger and realer consciousness of the community. The strong bear the burdens of the weak.

Even our rationality, or sanity, is a common standard, and is not a thing isolated and individual. It is something public, communal, and conjoint. Cutting loose from this, in that extreme individuality which is more than queerness, one comes to the insane asylum. Conscience too, according to

its name (con — together; science — knowledge) is the standard of a group. It is not individual, but joint knowledge. "No man liveth unto himself, and no man dieth unto himself." Together we stand, apart each falls. Many a man in the Church has recovered himself after the evil day, who had he been living as a secret disciple, would have permanently fallen away. In the Church, the expectation and the faith of others make the wheels of purpose and love go round, when the power within us for the time has failed. We recover ourselves, and live in future time, to give, like Peter of old, good proof of our fidelity.

Alone, a man's own purpose as a matter of fact, becomes vagrant and feeble. The necessity of making public one's purpose to follow Christ, lies in the fact that alone and in secret a man cannot hold fast his faith.

Belonging to an army, many a soldier has endured every travail, even weakness been glorified by high loyalty, who had he been fighting alone would have forsaken the cause. In some evil day, his heart and his flesh would have failed. In actual experience even veteran soldiers are enrolled and are not left to the

perils of their own timorous caprice. Great is the soldier who is caught up in the established



"Great is the soldier who is caught up in the established and common loyalty of his corps—a bigger and an intenser thing than his own vacillating weakness."

and common loyalty of his corps, a bigger and an intenser thing than his own vacillating weakness. Save for this, few soldiers would stand. If a nation should engage in war on the basis of secret and individual soldiering, it by this course would doom its most righteous cause and all its agony of sacrifice to

failure, while by united action it might bring even a base purpose to triumph. The Church, in insisting upon open and definite identification with it, does just what the army does. It has the the same serious earnestness, it knows the same secret, has shared the same experience, and has for insistence upon publicity the same reasons.

This is the secret of all glorified life. In the family we put behind the individual, the loyalty and love of the group, and rest back upon a common strength. Children are guided by a wisdom and will greater than their own, and but for these they would fall into the ways of folly. Blessed is the husband to whose strength is added the faith and expectation of his wife, and blessed is the father who in his children, has high motive to do valiantly. In turn they hope for him when he cannot hope for himself, and when he of himself would fall, they enable him to stand. In the school no one pupil makes the atmosphere that broods the place and creates in the coldest a desire for knowledge.

The Church finds its power in this same mutual momentum. Here the pull and the push of a surer body is with us. We get up-

on the mighty current of that faith and hope and love which is the presence of Christ in the Church. We require in the Church for its success just what we require elsewhere, and for the same reasons. "Where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God," and by the same inevitableness where the Spirit of God is, there the Church will come into being. It comes into being with the same certainty with which love brings the family into being, and a common loyalty the army. We tie ourselves up to a purpose and strength greater than our own. We close ourselves in by the seal of a will that is not wholly our own; a will as mighty as God's.

It is much as shepherds do with their sheep. Sheep are weak and silly creatures, quite unable to choose for and to protect themselves. So shepherds put them into the fold. There they are safe. In like manner do we give ourselves over under the will that is not wholly at the mercy of our foolish and vagrant caprice. In a day of vision and resolve, we make the future secure by deliberately putting up bars against our short-sighted and foolish desires. We choose for ourselves what the shepherd in his wisdom

chooses for his sheep. A sheep with the shepherd is greater than the sheep without



He who is seriously in earnest, in a day of wise discerning, puts up barriers against any desire to go back to the way he has condemned.

him. And a man in the Church is greater than the man outside of it. Just as a soldier in the army is greater than the soldier outside of it. Just as a boy in a school is greater than the boy outside of it.

Serious minded and earnest persons will not refuse to put their safety above their self-will and pride, nor hesitate to take the great

step that will put them upon a current, which, mighty where their own good motives are but weak, will carry them to God. This is just what becoming a member of the Church secures one in, just as becoming a soldier in an army lifts one into a man greater than otherwise he could be.

CHAPTER IV

JOINING THE CHURCH EXALTS A DELIBERATE CONCLUSION AS OVER AGAINST MERE CIRCUMSTANCE OR CAPRICE

The restraint involved in this absorption into a firmer will is good, and is no greater in the Church than it is elsewhere. Restraint is the necessary good thing in every relation. By it we shift from the basis of what we want to do, to the basis of what we ought to do, and from the basis of mere caprice to the basis of deliberate and far-sighted purpose. We put ourselves under it in school, and take as the pupil's greatest privilege the restraint the teacher is to us. To do there as we please would annul the value of the school, place us at the mercy of our ignorance and caprice, and set us adrift in lawless ways. When you do not rob a man you have but put restraint upon yourself, and done, not what you might prefer to do, but what you ought to do. Restraint is the bar we put up in marriage against our wayward affections, and by it we are kept in the evil day. In all govern-

ment we voluntarily put restraint upon ourselves, and hedge ourselves about by con-



"When you do not rob a man you have but put restraint upon yourself, and done, not what you might prefer to do, but what you ought to do."

stitution and law. Indeed, the whole progress of the race is measured by its self-imposed restrictions.

Restraint at any rate is laid upon us by the will of God, and whether or not we allow His will to be ours, His sway is over us. We have no right to a freedom that is larger than the freedom that is ours when we

come into fellowship with Christ and enter into the fold of the Church. Anything taken that this disallows is taken in license and is not lawful, and is here the same crazy will that licentiousness is elsewhere. When we are rich in wisdom and faith, on that high day when the glory of God's purpose for us shines within us — a day whose clear brightness does not always shine — on that great day, by a public profession of our purpose of loyalty, we bind ourselves under the restraint of the common conscience, and are drawn up by the pull of it to a personal conscious fellowship with God. Just as the child takes with gladness the parent's love, and the soldier takes the spirit and discipline of the army, and the husband the restraint it is even his delight to feel; and just as even the colt, surrendering its wild will to its master, lives to know higher delights than any offered by its untamed nature,—just so everywhere the laying restraint upon our affections and wills in accord with the Christian conscience and our own deliberate purpose, is the way to greatness.

It is a great day when the child is born under that love, and a great day when the

pupil enters the school, and a great day when the man vows his faithfulness in marriage, and a great day when the outlaw becomes a citizen, and a great day when whosoever will comes to Christ and into the Church of Christ. He is in real earnest in the great business of life, and will not shrink from the step that binds him under the good purpose that today is begot in him. It will seem to him only real wisdom, if having got across into this good country, he burn, against the danger of disgraceful retreat, all bridges behind him. That man can hardly be in earnest, who taking up the cross of Christ, will make sure that there be for him a way by which he can back out if such vagrant desire should tempt him, like the man in the Gospel, who, putting his hand to the plough, looks back where his heart is. A man who is as divided as that, however he may say his secret purpose to himself, is simply not fit for the Kingdom of God. He is not fit, because being divided and not loyal, he is not in earnest, is insincere and counterfeit, and will not endure. He who will not let his marriage be known is doubtless thinking he may want the release to which publicity

will stand in the way. His love is not entire, not genuine, and is not love. He who wants to fight as an independent soldier, is doubtless thinking he may want to desert the cause and go home. He is putting something before love of country. The really earnest disciple will bind himself with a thousand bonds if only thereby his wayward, uncertain self can be bound fast. The true lover will pledge his troth "in the sight of God and in the face of this company," if only that will establish his heart against the thought of evil. Just so in business, a really honest man in the day of his calm intention, puts a bond as a barrier in the way of any persuasion to dishonesty in the evil day. When a man openly confesses Christ, and by uniting with the Church, binds himself fast to a stronger purpose and love than his own, we know that he means something. Undivided, and the whole way through loyal to Christ, he, by the faith that holds when his own fails, will endure through all trial and to the end.

Once taken, such a firm decided stand is of immense value to one in dealing with himself. Save for some such decisive step,

sealing the purpose once for all and setting the momentum of high action going, one raises again and again the question of "which side?", goes again and again in debate over the same ground, fights the same unslain enemies again and again, and in vacillation is at the mercy of whatever caprice can prevail. Taking no open decisive stand, we do not stay put in one place, do not belong to either side, vacillate back and forth in indecision, put off and put off the taking that first and open step which making an end of wavering, starts one under mighty impulse, at the real beginning of the way to God. We easily fall away from the choice we have not openly expressed and sealed. Made only mentally, a choice is so lightly made as to leave little or no trace of its having been made at all. Our secret vows are lightly kept. Private, secret promises, proclaim their futility in all the unredeemed hidden pledges with which many a past is full. On the contrary in joining the Church, we have had not a mere emotion for a beautiful deed — we have instead done a deed, and under circumstances of such high moment, that an actual rut, with depth and length, is made on

the brain. The purpose is now committed to even a physical basis. It is on the brain as truly as a rut is in a road. A secret, private resolve, on the other hand, having no such advantage, fades quickly out of the memory. It has made no impression, has left no trace of itself — is much as if it had not been at all.

CHAPTER V

JOINING THE CHURCH DOES NOT CREATE OBLIGATIONS—IT RECOGNIZES THE OB- LIGATIONS THAT ALREADY EXIST

It is however the strictness of obligation inseparable from an open identification with the Church, that is to some the objection to membership in it. Many persons feel that outside of the membership of the Church they have a right to do what they could not do if they were members of it.

It is of course a fallacy. No man's acknowledging a thing to be obligatory is what makes it obligatory. Duty is not made by recognizing it any more than the sun is made by beholding it. The laws of health, for example, are bars put up against us, and much as we desire to have it otherwise, we have here no liberty to claim. The Ten Commandments are laws just as much to those who reject them as to those who acknowledge them, just as poison acts with the same deadliness upon those who do not know that it will kill, as it does upon those who do.

Gravitation is not made operative by our knowing the law of its working. Fire burns whether the child knows it or not; its burning does not depend upon his knowing. Those who do not promise to follow Christ are under obligation to follow Him. Is a citizen free to break law if only he does not promise not to break law? He who has not promised not to steal, is he free to steal? His promising to keep himself pure, is this what obliges a man to be pure? Is a man free to get drunk if only he has not signed the pledge? Ah no. Signing a pledge is a recognition of the obligation of temperance already existing; it is not what creates the obligation. And breaking a pledge is not the only sin. Indeed to break it may be no more wicked than not to take it.

Let us not be deceived about this. The promises we make when we come into the Church are not what create obligation. These promises are a recognition of and a confession of obligations that already exist. They exist even if they are not recognized. For obligation is made not by promises given, but by benefits, talents, capacities, powers, received. If you can show the court that the

complainant gave you nothing in exchange for the note he claims is your promise to pay, no court will give him judgment against you. If in your absence from your house, another moves in and occupies it, even though he has never agreed to pay you anything, you can collect from him according to reasonable equity, a just and fair rent. Agreeing to pay is not what makes financial obligation. It is a fair presumption of one's having received value. But if you lose your debtor's note, and no promise of his to pay can be proved, you can without doubt get judgment, if it can be proved that the claim covers services you rendered.

Accepting responsibility is not what makes responsibility. Promising to do right is not what puts one under obligation to do right. Men are not free to do as they please, if only they have not named the name of Christ. Do you think that Herod, by setting Christ at naught, freed himself of all responsibility?

Does God, do you think, have to wait till we acknowledge His law to have authority over us? Will He judge only those who confess Him? Or will he rather judge the whole world? Will He judge the Church by a dif-

ferent standard from that by which he judges the world? If wishing could do so much, it might be expected that it could make the scales weigh as we would. But they weigh according to great gravitation, and not according to our wishing. Do you think Peter was more guilty for denying Christ after he became a disciple, than Pilate was for denying Him once for all by not becoming a disciple? Is a son who sometimes grieves his father at home, more guilty than a son who once for all, denies his father by running away? Surely the pupil's willingness that the teacher rule is not what invests the teacher with his authority. Surely in the former time it was not the slave's consent that gave the master ownership. Indeed we are so little our own that about many things we have nothing to say; in spite of our protest death comes and takes us. All alike are under the law of Christ, they who do not believe on Him as surely as those who do. Unbelief, — the denial of responsibility — so far from setting us free from obligation, is the sin that includes all other sins. He who by one deliberate denial once for all rejects Christ, is by that unbelief, chief of sinners.

So far from its being a freedom from responsibility, unbelief is just the thing for which one is responsible.

One is responsible for his unbelief. This is Christ's teaching. He says of the Spirit, "he, when he is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, of sin, because they believe not on me."¹

The good man who threw himself into the water to save the child, though he failed to save him, is yet greater than he who from his place of safety, would not see his responsibility nor attempt a rescue. He who did not try to save the child is guilty with a blackness no failure of him who tried to do his duty can deserve. It is one thing to do unworthily in the Church, but it is a grosser sin not to attempt that fellowship at all. Let no one be deceived about that. The responsibility of him who believes, is great, but if he has failed, it is only because of the difficulty of the task he honestly tried to do. But the responsibility of the unbeliever is even greater, because he does not try, does not even consider the matter, nor put forth effort. The one will recover himself, his lapse is only for

¹ John 16: 8, 9.

the time. The other can never succeed, because he does not really begin.

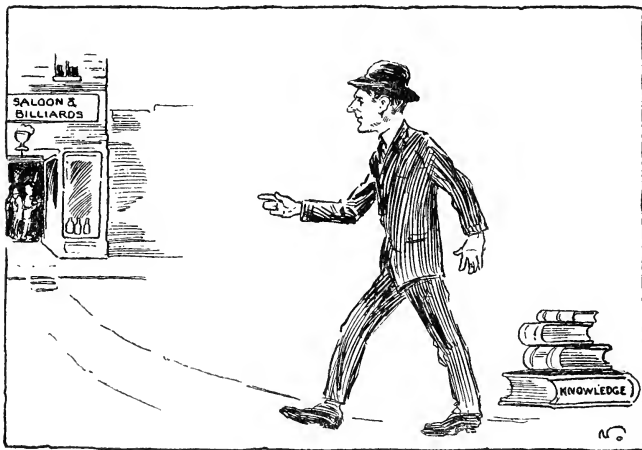
To try and yet to fail is certainly no such dishonor to the Church as is that he brings to it who never gives it the honor of an effort. He who will not in some way serve his country, is disloyal as he cannot be, who as a soldier, one day against strong forces, yields ground to the enemy. The drunkard who, trying to overcome his fault, yet breaks his pledge, is a greater man than he who beset by the same weakness, never feels the obligation of temperance, nor seriously tries to overcome at all. For an army to retreat, having once gone forward, is surely better than for another army in sheer disloyalty not to have attempted to go forward at all. Thinking carries with it doing, and so much so that one is responsible for what he thinks, same as the sower is responsible for the seed he sows.

The influence then, that does the greater injury to the Church and the cause of Christ, is not the seeming failures of those who confess faith in Christ; it is rather the influence of those who never believe in Christ so much as to confess faith in Him. Fearing lest

they might dishonor the Church if they should join it and then prove unfaithful, they by standing apart, really exert an influence against the Church, such as they could not in the other way. By one first denial they refuse all allegiance and service. By never attempting, they fail as they who honestly try cannot. They who sow not good seed, have already failed by the sowing they have made. For as the sowing carries with it its kind of harvest, so the thinking or believing carries with it its kind of conduct.

So far from its excusing a man, unbelief is the great sin. It is the great sin of the Bible. It includes all other sins. The great virtue of the Bible, including in it actual righteousness, is faith, belief. He who does not acknowledge Christ at all, denies him as one who merely stumbles in following him never can. He who does not confess him is guilty with a guilt that never can be his who, confessing him, is not yet made perfect. He who does not begin to follow has failed with a failure that is already complete; he who has begun to follow, given time, will come to the full glory of Christ. The former has denied Christ with

full deliberateness and from principle; the latter has only stumbled as he has tried to



"He who does not try to learn, has already dishonored knowledge, as he who trying to learn, though he does not excel, never can dishonor it."

keep step with the Infinite. He who does not try to learn, has already dishonored knowledge, as he who trying to learn, though he does not excel, never can dishonor it.

CHAPTER VI

TO CONFESS CHRIST IS PERHAPS THE GREATEST SERVICE ONE CAN RENDER

By publicly confessing Christ one gives witness for Him. It is perhaps the greatest service one can render. For men are persuaded by the testimony of other men, and upon that testimony Christ relies. When this witness becomes at all general, it is very powerful. Few things one can do could carry the weight of persuasion that is carried by the witness he gives who openly and publicly takes his stand for Christ. In that, heart appeals to heart, conviction to conviction, and courage to courage. Enlistments in an army will languish where no one is enlisting, but where brave men are offering their lives, bravery is begotten. Where young men are going to college, it will be certain that other young men will go. The earnest faith of those who by martyrdom bare witness to Christ, has been compelling power in every high day in the Church. The influence of man with man, and life upon

life, is one of the greatest facts, and is ground for one of the greatest of responsibilities. Christ asks that we confess Him. He laid the very heaviest of dooms upon him who should deny Him. He trusts us by our confessing Him to show our loyalty to Him. So important is that witness, that he depends upon it for the increase of his Kingdom.

By our silence here we are in the same way witnessing against Christ, and by our denial confirming others in their unbelief. We are making indifference and denial popular. Against that flood of witness in any place the Church of Christ can hardly make its way. This is not mere fancy. If you look into your own case, you will doubtless find that one great hindrance to your own belief and to a right decision in the matter of joining the Church, is the attitude of others. They overwhelm your good intentions; they give their vote against the Lord you would like to acknowledge. If He were owned as Lord by the many, you too would be persuaded to confess Him.

And as they thus hold you back by their denial, so you are holding others back by yours. It is the wrong side to be on; it is

indeed as definite and as active a disloyalty as one could be guilty of. If you bravely bore your witness for Christ, this would be the utmost you could do — a thing at which the very angels and not a few men would rejoice. You would without doubt be drawing after you the others whom until now, you have been confirming in their unbelief, and thus there be set through this act of yours, a tide of faith which would bear on it many and many into the fellowship of Christ. To confess Him is a thing so great that Christ could promise the greatest reward for its faithful doing; failure here is a thing so great that He could do no other than declare upon it the greatest doom.

This is about the only way one can offset his useless or his evil past, and secure his redemption. "He who converteth a sinner from the error of his ways, shall save a soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins."

But while he who does not believe is responsible for his unbelief, he who does not act out his belief nor do what he approves, needs to think what it is he is doing. For he, who in not confessing Christ pretends to

an unbelief that is not really his, is exactly the same kind of a hypocrite as is he who in confessing Christ, pretends to a belief that is not his. For the believer to hide his faith in a closet because he is afraid of the displeasure of unbelieving men, is just as bad as for one who does not believe to pretend to a loyalty he does not have — praying make-believe prayers on the street — because he is afraid of the displeasure of believing men. The one is as real a hypocrite as the other.

CHAPTER VII

WHO ARE FIT FOR CHURCH-MEMBERSHIP

The Church makes no claim to be only for perfect persons. Just as a school does not claim to be for fully educated persons, and an army only for victors. The school is for learners; and the army is for soldiers. One who will confess Christ as Lord — that is, as one who shall command the life — has just the necessary fitness for the Church. He needs no other preparation. It is the glory of the Church that even the weak in the faith are received. The Church supplies not enjoyment for a select group of perfect persons — there would be small need of the Church by such — the Church is a fellowship of imperfect persons, who with faith in Christ in their hearts, are, under the headship of Christ, helping each other to keep that faith, and are trying to spread it into the great world where they live. The strong bear the infirmities of the weak. The whole maintains a common faith and a common character, and in consequence, each becomes more

than himself and partakes of the character of the whole. That faith and that character keep true in spite of the lapse of any one. And that is why membership in the Church has always been said to carry salvation with it. Membership in the Church does carry salvation with it. That is just the greatness of it. Its head being Christ, the very spirit of Christ is in it. Christ is not all in each one; but He is all in the all which is the Church.

There would be no need of a Church if a person could alone overcome and triumph. Nor, then, would there be any needy persons. On the other hand, nothing could better meet the needs of men as we find them, than the Church, which taking the feeble faith most men have, plants it in the climate and soil of that fellowship which St. Paul calls "the body of Christ." For the Church to insist upon perfection as a condition for membership would be as if the school received as pupils only those who had learned already and alone the very things pupils cannot learn alone, but for the teaching of which the school exists.

One need not hesitate, therefore, to risk

his weakness and instability with the Church out of fear lest some lapse of his, bring reproach upon the cause of Christ. God is not so jealous of His majesty that to keep it from danger He will let go His whole purpose to save men. His Church is not so falsely holy that He cannot use it for the saving of souls. He is not like one, who because his house is so fine, and in order to avoid risk of dirt, keeps his children in the barn. No indeed. What must invite one, is the little preparation Christ required of those he admitted into his fellowship, and the little He is satisfied with as the fitness for membership in the Church. One would be sure to be wider of the mark in requiring much, than in requiring little, and all the fear lest one be not fitted, is likely but the setting up of a barrier for which Christ gives no warrant.

The fitness for Church membership is not goodness. The feeling "I am not good enough," in so far as it proves a person to have a lowly thought of himself, is evidence of choice fitness. On the other hand, he who should come with positive confidence that now he had got ready and was fit for the Church, would bring evidence of a very

doubtful fitness. Whom Christ would receive, Christ's Church would hardly be warranted in turning away, and in Christ's parable the publican's "God be merciful to me a sinner," is made ample justification. Touching our coming to Christ, we need no elaborate get-ready; all the fitness we require is to feel the need of Him.

Strange as it may seem, the sense of defect is a sign of moral health. For compared with the holiness of God, there is in every one of us, sure to be defect. Whether we have a sense of it or not, the fact is, we are all sinners. The great saints, seeing things in the light of Christ and as they are, have always had a sense of defect. Not to have it is rather a bad sign. For it shows a blindness to one's real moral condition. This is a serious thing. For he who sees nothing wrong with himself, when that wrong exists, can never get right, and can grow no more.

After all, what commends us to God is not an achieved righteousness, but that faith in Christ, which makes one feel his unworthiness. That faith, like a good tree bearing fruit, in due time produces righteousness. The sense of defect in us, driving us to de-

pend upon Another, is well-pleasing to God. Being promise of both our correction and our growth, it makes us acceptable to Him.

If on the other hand, one by his "I am not good enough," means that his heart and disposition are not right, that he cherishes and prefers some evil, that he holds out in some thing against doing what he approves, or allows himself to do what he condemns, or that he dodges where he ought to stand upright, then deliberately to hold fast to that, is proof of a most dangerous state of will. Of course such a person is not fit for the Church. But that does not do away with the responsibility; it simply shifts the first step elsewhere. To die of one disease is poor safety from not dying of another. To argue that because one does not believe on Christ, one has no responsibility for confessing Him, is as if one should plead he could not have robbed the bank because at that time he was elsewhere committing murder. Not to be fit for the Church is no excuse for not becoming fit; it simply shifts responsibility to the becoming fit.

Not to have taken the first step one ought to take, does not excuse one from all other

steps. Not to have taken the first step in the way of Christ, makes one guilty for all the other steps which in consequence of that neglect have not been taken. "I never learned to read" is no discharge of all the responsibilities of intelligence. One is presumed in law to intend all the natural consequences of his acts. Not to believe on Christ is a sowing that bears a whole harvest of iniquities, just as intemperance carries with it responsibility for all that enormity of evil fruitage which intemperance bears.

Fitness for church-membership, it need hardly be said, is not agreement with all others in doctrine. The Church is rather a brotherhood in service. It has one Lord, it has one faith in Him, it has one baptism or door of entrance into His body. Its bond is love — that partnership in work which is the doing good to all men. He who wants to work for Christ and His Kingdom, is by that purpose qualified for admission into the Church. That presupposes loyalty, the best kind of faith. It is better than a knowledge that is without passion for service and feels no sense of the world's need. For one's faith is in what he works for and puts his

money into. There may be, reader, some things you do not believe. Here is some-



The drunkard in getting drunk, became guilty of the murder he committed when drunk. In the failure to begin rightly was already the failure of his end.

thing you want to help to do. And that is better than a passionless agreement with others on points of doctrine. In the Church you work with others under the leadership of Christ.

CHAPTER VIII

SAINTS OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

In considering the claims of the Church, one may find himself reflecting that he outside of it, is as good as many another within it. And that may be true. And it may seem to him to be reason for continuance in his present way.

But may be he ought to be better than these others are. They have come up out of an evil past, or it may be that they, after all, are earnest persons who beginning at a low point, are, in spite of their stumbling, going in the right direction. God does not judge us one by another, which one can see would be no more fair in the matter of achievement than it would be in the matter of stature. God judges each man by the man's own self. Some men who drink whiskey may yet do more work than some other man who abstains. But this does not prove that drink is better than abstinence for any man. Someone apart from the schools may get a better education than someone else gets through

the schools. But this does not prove that the self-made man would not have done even better with the opportunities of the schools. The question for one to consider, is not whether he out of the Church, is as good as some other in it, but whether he, out of it, is as good as he himself would be in it. The commendation Christ gave to Mary for a deed so perfect as to be the type and memorial of all loyalty, was not that she had done as well as someone else, but that she had done what she could. If a man does so well outside of the Church, it is fair to believe that in it he would serve with a faithfulness that would endow him with new greatness and rival the glory of those in the Church, who are above reproach. He, joining hands with others in the open acknowledgement of Christ and in the partnership of a loyal service, is certainly a different kind of a man than he who can be satisfied if only he is as good as the weakest in the Church. He who is so little in earnest as to try to get off with a service whose faultiness can be compared only to that of the most faulty in the Church, is unworthy to be compared even to him who is least in the Church.

For in spite of the implication, the weak brother in the Church has not failed. The heart of the Gospel is, that it is a man's faith in Christ that saves him and not his deeds — just as the good tree is already guarantee of good fruit. As the greatest thing about the good harvest is the choice of good seed, so the greatest thing about a good life is the choice of good principles. If one has the love of God in his heart, he is more than his deeds now indicate. The stumbling disciple has something that makes him more than the faithless one he seems. He is faced in the right way, and though it seems to men he is in exactly the place where the unbeliever is, they are going in opposite directions, and are, after all, as different as good and bad. They seem alike now, but one is going one way and the other is going the other way, and in time to come they will reveal in wide contrast their present hidden difference. For they are different. The Gospel never obscures the fact that they are different. The one has in him some badness and the other has in him some goodness, but they are not the same. Black on white is not the same as white on black. Tares and wheat when they begin to

grow, look so much alike that servants set to pull up the tares, may easily from the resemblance, pull up the wheat. But in the harvest, by no carelessness could one be taken for the other. For all their looking so much alike when young, their natures are different. It is in the heart that a man is good. It is in the heart that a man is bad. This does not mean that what one does counts for nothing. It says that the motive is more than the act. It says that the direction in which one is going is more than the actual place one is in, on the way. It says that the man who is growing a little better, though he have grave faults, is greater than he, who though he be wholly respectable, is yet falling away from his ideals, and is growing, it may be only a little worse. The one giving over his will in obedience is better by far than the other who in his all-inclusive choice refuses to obey.

For the heart may be defiant and disloyal, though there be much good that a man does; and with the heart wrong, to God all is wrong. The heart may be right, though there be much wrong that a man does; and with the heart right, to God all is right. The one, in spite of his good deeds, because of his

evil heart, is already lost; the other, in spite of his evil deeds, because of his good heart, is already saved.

He who has given himself to God in the determination to do God's will, and has sealed that purpose by an open confession of Christ, is a different kind of a person. He is different, in that the center of his life is in God; and he is different in that the center of his life is in the Church. The righteousness of Christ is his because of the one, and the righteousness of the Church—its ideals, its purposes, its Lord—is his because of the other. New springs of conviction, steadfastness, and power, flow for him. He is more than himself because of his alliance with them. He is on a tide that he does not make. What he could not do alone, he can do because of them. As the sheep is more than itself because of the shepherd, and the pupil is more than himself because of the teacher, and the child is more than himself because of the parent, and the soldier is more than himself because of the army, so the believer is more than himself because of the fellowship of the saints. The confidence, that if a person is baptized, he is thereby saved, has it validity here. For

baptism is the rite of initiation into the Church. And the Church does have the salvation of its members in its keeping. The presence of Christ is in it. Consequently, it is actually true that he who believes and is baptized is saved. What he cannot do alone, he can do because of the push and pull of the Church.

The Church does not fear to be judged by the character it makes. With but forty per cent of our population in the Churches, eighty per cent. of all the social workers in America are members of our Churches. More than seventy-five per cent. of the private gifts to public charity in the city of Boston, are from church members. Judge Fawcett of Brooklyn has stated that of the twenty-seven hundred or more persons brought before his court in five years, not one was associated with the Church. Apparently the law-breakers and the great sinners are outside, the fruit of that unbelief which is the essence of sin. On the other hand, the worth of the Church is proved by the fact that of all the men whose names appear in "Who's Who," as many as one out of twelve is the son of a minister.

CHAPTER IX

PUBLIC CONFESSION OF CHRIST IS THE TEST OF THAT LOYALTY WHICH MAKES THE CHRISTIAN

The reader may here find himself asking whether he is a Christian. He may be saying "I cannot join the Church, because I do not know that I am a Christian." No; the Church is the family of Christians.

It is submission to the will of God that makes the Christian. The Christian is Christ's man. He takes Christ as his master. He takes Christ's yoke, just as the humble ox takes the yoke of its master. Paul calls himself "Christ's slave." The Christian is not his own — he is owned. He who faces this issue and gives way to Christ is a Christian.

It is all something like this: Two men have borne for years the feeling of enmity toward each other. They have been ruled by their pride. And then one humbles himself and bows down for the sake of Christ. He becomes Christ's servant, and Christ be-

comes in fact, his Lord. He ceases to please himself and now pleases Christ. His purpose is not to do what is pleasant, nor what is expedient, but only what is right.

It is just this test of "Who rules?" that is afforded by a public confession of Christ. It brings to a point and makes definite the loyalty or the disloyalty of a person. It is a real test of who is master. To confess Christ, runs across the grain of our proud, wilful nature. We want to please ourselves, to set ourselves up in independence of Him and in opposition to Him. Here in the matter of a public confession is the very same narrow gate he goes through who becomes a Christian. He then, who can here now go through this narrow gate, need have no doubt whether he is Christ's. He has surrendered himself. That is why the public confession of Christ stands at the entrance into Christ's Church. It is a test whether one is loyal. And loyalty and nothing else is the soul of religion.

Persons who some years ago publicly confessed Christ, will find in their now confessing their faith in Him by the transfer of their membership to the Church in the place

where they now live, the only real proof of their now having a faith that is alive. For the same issue of "Who rules?" is by this matter now once again forced upon them.

The public confession of Christ is the needed test of loyalty. For let it be understood that the seriousness of discipleship involves the giving up of our wills. To do what we do not want to do is what it means. For to obey only in what one pleases to obey in, is hardly obedience. That puts self and not Christ on the throne. Here then, in the confession one is resolved not to make, is exactly the thing Christ is resolved shall prove our loyalty. And until one in this thing, can humble one's self, one is rebellious. Some such test therefore is necessary at the door of the Church. Less than this absolute surrender Christ could not ask, and less than this, the Church could not ask.

It is vain to think one is loyal while there is a stiff and deliberate refusal at even one point of issue. One does not need to deny in everything in order to deny Christ, any more than one needs to die of every disease in order to be dead. And somewhere this issue of "Who rules?" must come up. It may be

here, or it may be there, but it must come up. And just this test of who is master, is afforded by the command that we confess Christ before men. That one is resolved not to do this, is just the reason why it becomes the thing that one shall do. Here is afforded just the situation that is needed — a definite decision of loyalty, an act and a deed, time and place. For it matters little how long one thinks a thing over, and how deeply he feels about it, and how he admires the doing it, and how much he intends to do and resolves to do, and how many promises he makes — these all wait in a futility worse than useless — wait in a sapping of the power of the will and of the power of decision — wait in a paralyzing weakness — for the act that alone makes purpose into other than dreams.

CHAPTER X

AT SOME MORE CONVENIENT SEASON

The reader, without doubt, once he gives his approval to this matter, will be tempted to put off the taking the first step.

But he who thus dallies with duty is already lost. To put off the doing, is by that very putting off already to have decided against. For ought not the glory of Christ at once persuade one? And if in the face of that glory, one puts off and delays allegiance, must not that action show that preference for something else that amounts to a denial of Christ? One who does not follow "straightway" does not at all value the glory of the Master, whom he says he will follow by and by. When in the parable, the merchantman finds one pearl of a great price, every other is as nothing to his desire—he goes straightway, sells all that he has and buys it. How long may one put off beginning to tell the truth, beginning to be pure? "Why" we say, "these things never become more right than they are this moment." And

just as he who puts off beginning to be pure, does not believe in purity, and just as he who puts off the ceasing to steal does not believe in honesty, so he who puts off confessing Christ does not believe in Christ. He believes in something else more. And so by putting off, he has actually decided against Christ. He who puts off confessing Christ, has by that deliberate choice annulled that other deliberate choice by which in secret intention and by all his deep admiration, he gave himself to Him. Just as the debtor who always intends to pay, yet never gets around to begin, annuls by his deliberately spending his money for something else, all the promises he has made. Just as in the tragedy, Hamlet's hesitation and delay enthrone acts that swallow up his intention, till, caught in the grip of this paralysis, his life, by the momentum of its indecision, runs on to its tragic close.

To put off to another time, the taking the first step is already to lose. It is to lose the conviction in which the determination to act at all, even at some other time, is born. We catch this vision today, but we do not have it tomorrow. The light by which this is seen as duty does not always shine. But the convic-

tion we have is only because bright light has shone. What we have now is all we can ever have. The prodigal is saved, because in that far country, having a feeling of shame and regret, he at once suits action to feeling. He said, "I will arise and go." And he arose and went. He was up and away before he slept. That decision and that promptness saved him. If he had waited a day—even the waiting would have been proof that he was not in earnest. And denying his conviction for the time, he surely would not have felt it so strongly, if he had felt it at all, the next day. Ah no. It is not waiting that makes the conviction grow stronger, but the going ahead in the strength of what conviction there is, just as in the case of those automobiles which, by their very going make light for their way.

Like other living things, the soul has its seasons. There are times when we feel strongly that we ought to do some good thing. At these times we are not far from the Kingdom of God.

"There is a tide in the affairs of men,
Which, taken at its flood, leads on to fortune ;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries."

No one knows just where this dividing line is, and when one is about to cross it. The beginning of all things is in darkness, both in time and in space. We can tell that the tide is coming in, and later we can tell that it is going out; but just when that tide, now resistless, turned, we did not know. We are certain that a while ago it was full day, and now we are sure that it is night, but just when the darkness began to settle down, we did not know. A man knows that some time ago he was well; he knows now that he cannot live, but when he crossed that fatal line, he could not know. It may be said that in any man's life up to some point, there was the probability that he would respond in a definite decision to the influences of good that press upon him; that beyond a certain point, it was unlikely that he make any response. But where that point was and when he passed by it, he could not tell.

We do not know. Therefore, lest it be the point of turning, we must seize the opportunity at hand. "No man knoweth the day nor the hour when the Son of man cometh." Therefore, as the porter at the gate, faithful to every moment, lest this neglected

moment be the very one when his Master shall come, we must watch. For any moment may have in it our very destiny. This present conviction of ought with which one is tempted to trifle, may actually be the turn of the tide. For every good inclination of feeling is fully sacred. It is the very voice of God. Without any question it is the most serious matter conceivable, this stirring within the soul of a true desire which exalts this moment. And the difference between men touching their eternal welfare, is just the difference with which they give response to that word. The real dividing line is "I will."

The soul has its seasons. Boys who put off the learning to read to some more convenient time than youth — put off either because they feel it will be easier to learn at some other time than now, or from simply drawing back from doing the thing at hand because it requires some nerve — miss their chance. They miss it so completely that it is the rarest of things that a man once grown up, learns to read. Once pass a few years of early life and the opportunity is gone.

You can readily see, reader, that to put off deciding, or to put off acting on a decision

one has made, does not settle anything. The same issue still presents, the same obligation



You would not counsel boys to make this the way to knowledge, nor argue that there will be for them a better time to learn.

still holds, the very same steps must sometime be taken. Waiting can do no more than let the chance go by. To settle a thing, one must decide it, and do it. To put off doing a thing is not to do it any more than putting off sowing is to sow the seed. To settle an account one must pay it. To put off paying does not make the amount less; it adds

interest and makes the debt more, and therefore harder to pay. Nor will God be more gracious tomorrow, nor make easier terms. Nor by putting off, does one gain power to act, nor is the performance of duty thereby made easier. On the other hand, the present denial, making the rut of denial on the brain, makes other denials easier, till in time, one lacks the power to execute anything disagreeable. He who does not heed the call to-day, will be less likely both to hear it and to heed it tomorrow. The statistics of a group of Churches show that ninety per cent. of their members joined the Church before they were nineteen years of age. Since at least one-half of the people do not join the Church at any age, if of those who join the Church, nine of out of ten join it before they are nineteen years of age, then at that age, out of twenty persons, nineteen already have closed the Church against themselves. And certainly at this age they have closed it not by once for all and deliberately refusing to join the Church, but by the self-deceit of putting off.

The same statistics show that one-half the members of these Churches joined the

Joined
the Church
before they
were nine-
teen years
of age - $\frac{9}{10}$

Joined
the Church
after they
were nine-
teen years
of age - $\frac{1}{10}$

The folly of those
who put off

Church before they were sixteen years of age. They acted when others promised. They acted and the thing was done. Youth, life's springtime, is the season of beginnings. In the springtime of life the future is sealed, as the kind of seed chosen and sown in nature's springtime seals once for all, the harvest. The choices of youth carry in them more than the day in which they are made; they carry in them the future years. For what we think and what we do, make actual ruts on the brain. If one could see in on the surface of the brain one could see the ruts of our thinking

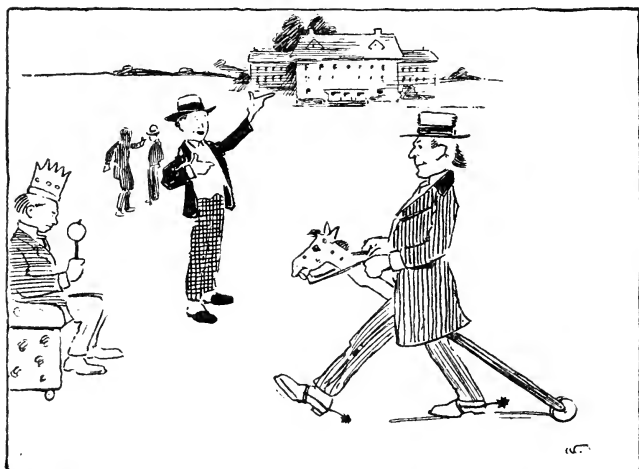
and of our doing there. They have length and depth like other ruts. They give one's character a genuine physical basis, and prove how surely it becomes fixed. Once made, these ruts keep us in them, whether we will or not. That is what makes each choice a serious thing — it makes a groove we cannot easily get out of. We cannot turn out of the rut made by doing, at the mere desire. And we cannot make new ruts because we are so deeply in the old. To have first to break off drinking — ah! what a handicap that is to temperance!

The completeness of this bondage is proved by the fact that we are apt even to think in accord with what we do. Consequently, after a while, in case we do other than we approve, we cannot see things as they are. We see them only as our doing has made them appear. The drunkard does not see drunkenness with the same horror as at first. He is biased in his thinking by what he does. Doing shapes thinking, just as thinking shapes doing. Thus the very standard of right — that sense which is the birth-right and the health of the soul — is debased. The way we shall regard things

comes to be already determined by the way we have acted toward them. The longer one puts off considering going to school, and the longer he puts off going to school once the matter has his praise, the surer is it by the crowding in of what he has crowned in its stead, to be forced from its throne. For one cannot long even admire what he will not do. That undermining of the very foundation of moral sense makes the folly of putting off. Since our mere admiration of a thing makes no such groove on the brain as is made by what we do, what we do now instead of the good thing we promise to do sometime, overtakes and destroys what we admire and think and promise to do.

The very foundation of judgment — the sense by which right and wrong is reported in true character — is undermined by delay. And just as touching the mind this corruption of the standard of sanity is a terrible thing, so touching the spirit, this corrupting of the moral sense is terrible. For in insanity, the standard of reason being shattered, all hope is gone since there is now no sanity by which reason may be tested and its faultiness made to appear. If the compass

is crazy, who using it, can tell which is north? Exactly so when in a man the moral standard



In insanity the standard of reason is shattered, and there is now no saneness by which reason may be tested and its faultiness appear.

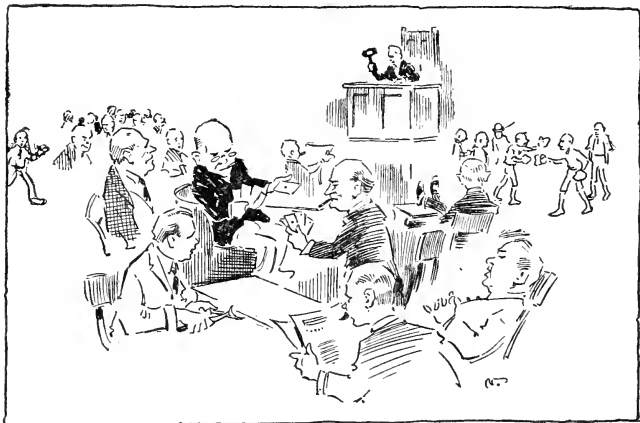
itself is overthrown, there is nothing by which his purposes and his conduct can be tested, and his error be shown. We speak both of losing the mind and of losing the soul, and what we know of the one makes plain the reality and the horror of the other.

Delay, if one be honest in it, can be only that one may have time for serious effort to reach a settled conviction. Not all the evi-

dence is yet in, and in consequence one cannot make up one's mind. But it is clear that if one is honest in the matter of delay, one will not allow it to be mere dalliance, but will promptly get all the evidence in and decide. He who asks that he may wait till he gets all evidence in—if he is honest in his asking, and his asking delay be other than an excuse—cannot spend the time doing everything but getting in evidence. He who makes unreadiness the reason for not going to school, must—if there be truth in his word—be busy with nothing else till he is ready. For, he does not prefer, what he does not at once prefer to make ready for; he prefers what he puts first and makes ready for.

To put off considering a matter and to do no more, is folly. It is the unbalance of a fool. It is the court all organized for deliberation and judgment, that puts off and puts off, and busy with trifles, never takes up the case nor tries to reach a verdict. It is the senate where no one puts a motion, where no business is introduced and considered, while month after month is frittered away, with the excuse for inaction, that it does not know the facts. It is the weaver whose spindle and

wool are ready, but who puts off and puts off beginning, and the first threads of the gar-



The fool senate does all sorts of things except consider its real business.

ment he declares he wants to make are not spun. Into such dishonesty the inaction and indecision of putting off involve one. It looks very much like an excuse hiding the real determination not to consider the matter at all.

To put off acting along the line of one's conviction and approval is like separating judgment and its execution. The jury has brought in its verdict, and sentence is pronounced. But execution is stayed. The

discussion has gone on, the evidence is all in, the right is clear as day, and a verdict is reached. But there all ends. No step is taken to carry the verdict into effect. The yarn is spun and the cloth is woven, but it never becomes a garment.

Putting off action to some future time is of course a trick of deception one practices upon one's self. It grants the obligation, admits the rightness of the claim, and therefore does it honor. But then by present actual neglect, the whole intention is dethroned and supplanted. The mere approval, or the promise to do the thing sometime, deceives one into the feeling that one's duty is done, sets one at ease, while the actual denial steals in and rules, in the contrary deed at hand. One promises one's self "sometime" to take this step, and the mere promise soothes to sleep the sense of duty, and under this contentment, opposing things near at hand, rush in and strangle the very promise, one by inaction, has let go to sleep. Putting off like other lies, deceives with a promise, the soul's present desire to do duty.

Putting off, whatever the guise it takes, is a form of indecision. It is a deadly defect

of character, for after all it is a real denial. Thus McClellan seems to have fooled him-



He who puts off paying for the clothes he wears, and the meals he eats, and the rent of his rooms,—refusing to do now all he can to meet his expenses—comes soon to find that by such borrowing from the future, tomorrow, instead of being before him, is behind him, and in all the claims unsatisfied, is now an enemy stealing up to stab him to death.

self by supposing that in his inaction he was getting ready for striking the great blow, we now know, he was incompetent to strike. Amiel, a brilliant young professor in Geneva, with talents that promised a noteworthy career, slowly disappointed his admirers and passed into obscurity. From his journal it

appears that he was always waiting to be a little better prepared before attempting anything. See how it works in one of the commonest situations of life. A debtor admits the claim against him, can never consent to the deliberately defrauding his creditor, and yet by the subtile deceit of putting off, spite of his intention, his neglect to pay now by admitting other things to rule, makes that defrauding actual. And thus our great convictions and our great resolutions, not at once acted out, come, by a thing as seemingly innocent as neglect, to their death, buried with the generations of bright hopes and dreams of good and lofty promises with which the past is full.

“Don’t talk about things you are going to do,
Don’t say that you mean to be noble and true,
Don’t wait till tomorrow to make up your mind
That you’ll make others happy, and always be kind ;
For tomorrow you’ll talk as you’re talking today,
And your good resolutions will vanish away.
Do it now—let the world see you mean to be true !
Oh ! don’t talk of the things you are going to do !”

For the story of many, many lives would surely be different if the promises men make in putting off were redeemed. It cannot be

that the persons who we see are now so indifferent and insensible, have never felt the claims of service, and have never given any admiration to love. No. They once felt the wooing of the Spirit of God as we all have. They felt the wooing of the Spirit of God, but they dared to put off the taking the step that is the hearty and prompt response. They put off upon some other time the doing the thing they were then too faithless to do. That trick set them at ease and gave their weakness its way. But that very step may bankrupt the soul that a right first step would have enriched, and the promise could not be redeemed.

Up therefore reader, and once for all decide this matter. Get in the reasons for and against, give your verdict, and act. Take by action the first real step. Be sure, what you do counts for more than what you promise and intend. Do not let yourself be persuaded that you will have the courage to do next month or next year the thing you are afraid to do now. It is determination, decision, that adds the needed factor; mere waiting never supplies it. Unnourished by some fitting action, and unsupported by some

fitting deed, our good intentions die; slain by rival evil, which masked as harmless neglect, steals in and chokes any intention we allow to sleep.

Act; act. And do not wait with the idea that everything must favor. That support never comes to anything. Some objection besets every enterprise, wind the sower, cloud the reaper. The sower asks only that there be a fair chance for sowing; the reaper asks only that there be a fair chance for reaping. You do not wait till everything favors buying, or selling, or journeying, or marrying, or playing, or resting, or eating. You expect to find in these two sides, to weigh for and against, and choose. Some objection can be found to every undertaking. One who waits till everything favors will wait and wait and attempt nothing.

And remember too, that what is needed in most cases is not more arguments and reasons to persuade, but simply that determination without which any force of argument will be in vain. He who does not want to sow will find excuse enough in the wind; he who does not want to reap will find excuse enough in the cloud.

Religion, or loyalty, like every other accomplishment is based on will and not on feeling; it springs out of principle and not out of emotion. It seizes the chance of whatever sort it is, by determination supplies the lacking thing, and does not wait for great overpowering emotion. Emotion is only a balmy climate, a matter of mood, but no real enterprise is allowed to depend upon the weather. If the weather be fair, blessed be the day; but if it be not fair, still we go forth to our labor. We cast forth the seed in the face of the wind; we reap under threatening skies. That is the valid proof that we are sincere and in earnest.

This determination—keeping one's self genuine in the face of plausible excuses—offers the only chance for beginning, the only ground for enduring. It seizes the day of whatever sort it is, and works as it can, in the assurance that just this day is one's chance. Soldiers who should report on the basis of their feeling, would be an army in which no dependence could be put, up or down according to the weather, their own or any other's. But an army, such from principle, like Cromwell's Ironsides, would be a perfect

fighting machine and establish any kingdom. Workmen who would work on the basis of inclination and not on the basis of determination, would by that inconstancy shatter any industry; be just like the men who would be kept from work by cold or heat, or wind or cloud. For inclination is just the heart's weather, real, but not to be allowed to command.

One must take himself strictly in hand in beginning any good work. That first step, without which all other steps wait for their direction, will not take itself. It simply must be taken. The will must be girded up for this thing — the determination that makes things come to pass. Starting on the way only when we shall have been overpowered by some mighty emotion, we wait for that perfect day when we shall be swept out of ourselves, carried over every obstacle and overwhelmed by a great conjunction of favoring things. In our imagination, under some such spell, we make all kinds of sacrifices, dare the Lord's enemies, bear convincing witness, and annex whole provinces to the Kingdom of God. But waiting for that perfect day that never comes, seedtime and

harvest come and go, and all the opportunities by which we make the first beginnings of love.

The gospels warn us against trusting to circumstances to overwhelm us. We imagine we will do tomorrow what we are too cowardly to do today, and comfort ourselves in our neglect with the thought that we would be more faithful in some chance we do not have than we are to the one we do. But he who misses the present chance surely has poor preparation for laying hold of any in the future — that preparation lying more in us than in any outward circumstance, and Jesus exposed the hypocrisy of the excuse. It was to this mind exactly that Jesus, replying to Dives' excuse for his brothers—"if one went to them from the dead they will repent"—makes Abraham say of them, "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded if one rose from the dead." In the practical business of life we do not reason that he who has refused the opportunities of a humble sort, will be faithful in some great place now open. We do not promote to place of power him who, scorning the lowly task has waited for the coming of some

greater day. No. It is not more reasons why we should be faithful that we need, and not more evidence to persuade us, nor greater and greater light. What we need is just plain honesty, plain genuineness in dealing with the present duty and the present chance. He who does not give two mites out of penury, however much he dream he would do if only he had riches, will with great superfluity be loveless still. "What would you do if you had fifty thousand dollars" was once asked a poor man. "What I am doing with one thousand dollars," he replied. And that is true. More money does not change our hearts any more than more clothes change them. Real sacrifice is as often found among the poor as among the rich. Many opportunities is no assurance that one will make right use of them. And the only ground for confidence that one will rightly use tomorrow when it comes, is that one is rightly using today.

CHAPTER XI

THE TERRIBLE CONSEQUENCES OF INSINCERITY IN SETTLING A QUESTION

It is clear from the foregoing that a person may easily permit himself to fool himself in this matter. Any reasoning that is not wholly genuine but rather excuse, is just a fool's mask for hiding frowning facts. It is lying to one's self. It is giving things a value they do not have. It is counting brass, gold. It is counting heat, cold; cold, heat. This is inviting dangerous confusion. For all such insincerity is throwing distrust upon the faculties of the mind and soul — upon those very faculties which are as compass to keep us in touch with reality and value, and so from being lost. All excuse puts in the place of these values, not what is real, but only what is agreeable. It is as if one overthrew in himself that sanity which keeps him rational. To that abdication of sincerity, light is not light, and darkness is not darkness. Right does not pass as right and wrong does not pass as wrong. The gen-

uine is made to pass as counterfeit, and the counterfeit as genuine. This is the topsy-turvy world exhibited by the insane. When a man will not follow the compass of his soul, but enthrones mere indifference or mere preference where reality and the truth of God ought to be — that quality which makes all things into order and not chaos — he has so cut loose from moral direction and moral value as to be already lost. When good is not good to a man, and evil is not evil, he is lost. Life has become a thing of deceit and make-believe, which he takes as real. Of course, closing our eyes to facts cannot change the facts. It cannot change the facts any more than the pilot's tearing up his chart can remove the rocks from the sea. Practicing the deceit involved in all insincerity, one after awhile comes actually to believe not what is right, nor what is true, but only what he wants to believe, and thus the very standard of judgment be errant and debased, like the mind that overthrown by defying itself, loses sanity. We speak of the one as having lost his mind; of the other as having lost his soul. And in both cases the hopelessness of the estate appears, be-

cause the very standard itself — obedience to which keeps one true, — is the thing that is debased.

It were doubtless agreeable to you, reader, if you could turn away from all consideration of this matter; doubtless agreeable if you could put off doing what you feel you ought to do; put off the opening of this matter at all. But as he should do you no kindness who counselled this, so you should do yourself no kindness if you took the counsel. Here is a claim upon you. It is yours to consider whether it is valid, whether it is the claim of God. You may consider whether this claim is from God, may consider it sincerely and honestly, in full view of the facts. That will be to take gold as gold, to take counterfeit as counterfeit. Or you may consider this claim in a way that while your consideration of it is really dishonest, will let you think you have done it candidly. You may thus take counterfeit as gold. But if you made east, west, and north, south, you could not get where you wish to go and would be lost. You would not know where you are, nor how to get back to a given place again. And just so with moral values and

directions. The maintenance of insincerity in dealing with right and wrong, puts the one in the place of the other, till one cannot tell the true from the false, nor the right from the wrong. Allowing that to go on in your soul, your very standard by which moral values themselves are measured becomes corrupt, till you cannot even know how at variance with the moral world you are.

That is the terribleness of sin. And that is the reality of the consequence of sin. We speak in the one case of losing the mind, and in the other case of losing the soul, and what we know of the terribleness of the one makes plain the terribleness of the other.

CHAPTER XII

FEAR OF OTHERS MAY TAKE THE PLACE OF OUR OWN HONEST CONVICTION

One could hardly believe that in so serious a business, a man could set up for himself to act by, such a thing as what some others will think. But truly there are persons who put their timidity and fears on the throne where only their honest convictions should be. They put what others will think before loyalty to Christ. It is nothing to such that they know what they ought to do, nothing that the compass of the soul points its sure direction, nor the scales of judgment show the great values — nothing to them that God has a will and that they have convictions and approvals. They are afraid of men, and give themselves and the direction of life over under the dominion of some few of human kind. They are ashamed of Jesus. So they decide they will deny him before men and confess Him in secret.

It is as if the mariner ignored the compass, and his chart, and the stars, for the caprice

of some sailor. It is as if an Apostle, ashamed of the Gospel, received his message from some other he is more anxious to please than the Lord, who, as friend and judge, does rule over both the just and the unjust.

CHAPTER XIII

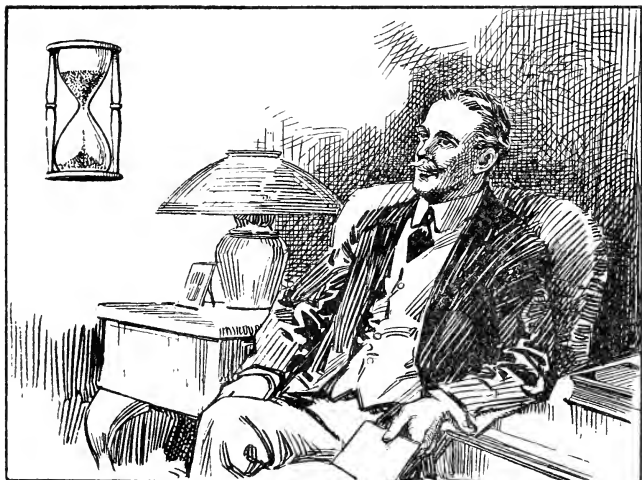
ONCE THE START IS MADE, CHURCH-MEMBERSHIP IS FULL OF DELIGHTS

Like many other things, church-membership, once the start is made, is full of delights. Interest, as we understand perfectly in the case of money, follows investment. We are apt to become interested in what we are busy with and invest time in. They who have no interest in the ball games we delight in, have only to go to the games for a while, to become as interested in them as we. Conscripts dreading service in the army, once they taste the life, enjoy campaigning just as veterans do. Missionaries delight in their work; delight in it as much as other men delight in bridging rivers and painting pictures and running races and making money. Church people are happy people — are the happiest people you can find. They are not constituted differently from other persons, nor is this relationship in itself distasteful. They do not live a dull, uninteresting life, nor go forward under the feeling of re-

gret that this fellowship with Christ is duty. No. They take their cross and find that after the taking, they have rest and delight. After the first taking, the yoke is easy and the burden is light, just as Christ said. These were once just such persons as you, — as you who think you could never be happy in the Church. And here now, they are the most genuinely happy persons in the world.

Starting is the hard part. Once in the way, one does not find the Christian way harder or less delightful than other ways. After the plunge, swimmers in cool water find the water warm. Pigeons do not find flying difficult, but starting is hard. Once in the air, they can fly for hours, but made to rise from the ground a few times in succession, they are so exhausted that they will not try to rise again. Once started on the Christian way, one finds it as delightful as other ways. And far more rewarding. For the sake of being spared the cost of the first start, it is foolish to let the whole of life be lost. In all after years — your life then made glorious — you can be mighty glad if in the springtime of your years, in spite of your desire to spare yourself this effort, you chose

and sealed as yours while you could, the good part. It will be small comfort surely,



"In after years you will be mighty glad, if now in the spring-time of your years, you sealed as yours while you can, the good part."

if all along through life and at its end, all you have for the glory you have missed, is the poor satisfaction you will get out of the thought that you had your own foolish way. To please yourself may seem to you to be worth something now, but you know perfectly well that because a thing is pleasant, does not justify it. In a little while you will

curse the day you let the pride of the moment give direction to all your years.

Up then reader, and tolerating in yourself no thing you would condemn in another, put yourself on Christ's side. Take now, the step that will seal your choice, past any lapse your future mood or wilful preference may bring to a secret choice. Just such a resolute decision marks every beginning. Begun is half done. One takes himself in hand when he starts on a journey, goes to the hospital, joins the army, confesses a fault, pays a debt, chooses an occupation, breaks a habit. We say "Now, this is the day." And at once the step is taken that seals the resolve past change. Vacillating, hesitating, indecision makes cowards of us all, and crowds upon the throne of life by inaction the very thing which in intention, sober choice has dis-crowned. Indecision lets in upon us in some deed at hand, the thing that supplants what our sober reason and conscience have crowned. By taking charge of the first step, our denial really faces us in the wrong direction. That is why it is all-important that the actual thing we do now and at once should express our sober judgment. What we

promise sometime to do, cannot hold its own against what we actually do at once.

It is with the profound hope that something herein written has touched the heart of the reader, that leave is taken of him. Let him be reminded that it is in the sense of ought he finds in him, that God speaks to him. If any such feeling has come to the reader, let him be sure his is a high privilege. That sense within one cannot be out of keeping with all the other creation of God, but fits in with it and is supported by it. That sense is in him because the fact to which it answers is the reality outside of him. So all things belong to him who follows it, just as all things work with him who follows great nature. Let the reader take it as a good sign that he can still hear this voice, and see the sin of going in the contrary way. What remains for such an one to do — the next step — is openly to ally himself with those in his community who, joined together in a body stronger than any one of them alone, make the spirit and presence of God real in their lives and in the world.

TO THE READER

Knowing as I do the greatness for weal or woe, of the step you will now take — whatever it is — I beg to add a personal word. If you are sincere in this matter — unwilling to play any trick upon yourself, and resolved to practice no deceit with yourself — you will want to know how you may make the most out of your determination to do what so fully approves itself to you.

Your safety, be assured, lies in your taking at once a step in the direction in which you want to go. In some way commit yourself at once. Make a covenant with yourself. If you are in earnest, you will not hesitate to make a covenant also with your God. And having made the covenant sincerely, and being resolved to keep it, you will not fail to enlist your pastor on your side. Write him some note like follows. To take this step promptly is to win. Not to do this is to take counsel of your excusing, reluctant, weaker self. It is to take a step in the other direction. Certainly to be defeated now in this first contest, does not promise anything different for the contest tomorrow. No; be sure the decision you make now, great with weal or woe, is your binding decision, and make it right.

EDWARD E. KEEDY.

To.....

Pastor of.....Church.

Dear Mr.....

When it is convenient for you, I should be glad if you will tell me something about what is involved in joining the Church, and what fitness is required.

Cordially yours,

.....

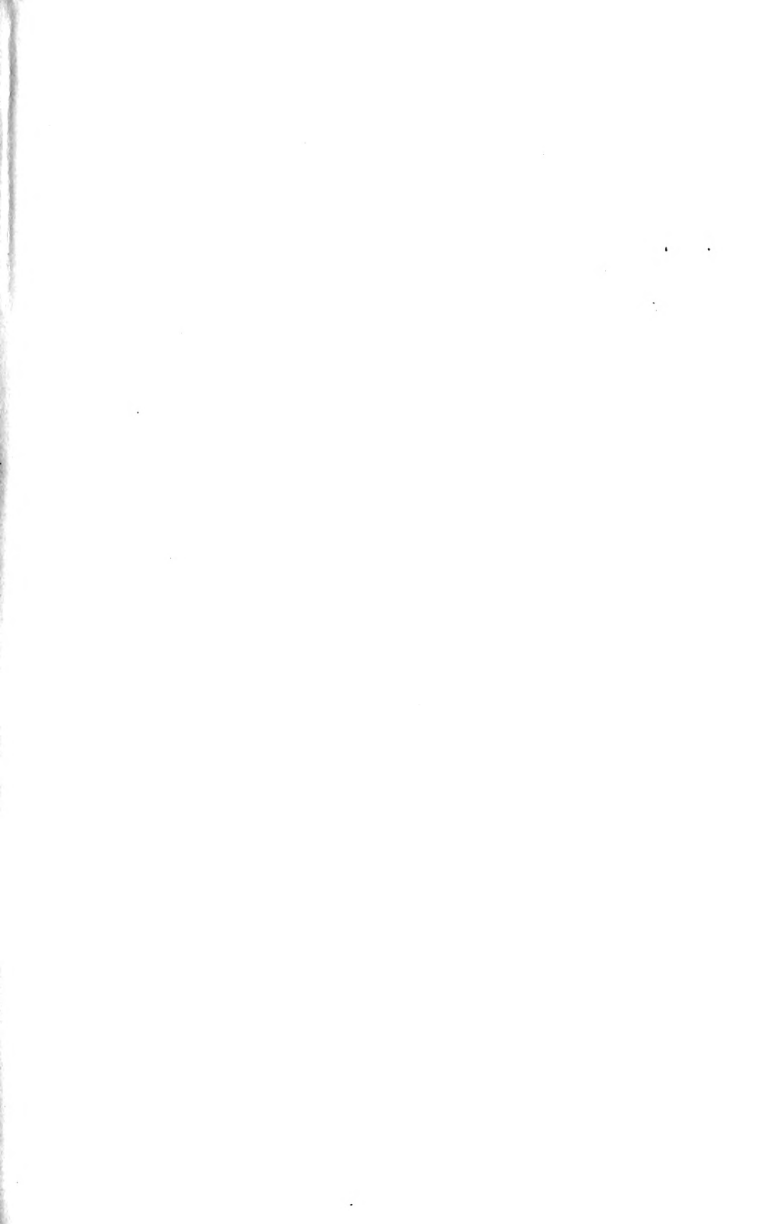


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